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**Catherine the Great and the
Assassination of Czar Peter III - I**

Lead: From relatively obscure beginnings, Sophie Auguste von Anhalt-Zerbst, married her powerful appetites to ruthless ambition and became Catherine the Great.

Intro.: *A Moment in Time* with Dan Roberts.

Content: It was her fortune to be connected in her mother's line to one of the premier houses of Germany, the Duchy of Holstein. This gave her rank and eligibility among upwardly mobile 18th century European

aristocrats. Her family played well the game of marriage intrigue and Sophie ended with one of the great prizes. She was betrothed to the grandson and heir of Czar Peter the Great of Russia. The young man, Karl, who later took the name Peter III, was one of history's truly accomplished nit-wits. He never realized that intellectually he had married above his station.

Young Sophie arrived at the glittering court of St. Petersburg in 1744 armed with her mother and two spare dresses and quickly moved to get rid of the outward impediments to her success. To diminish her alien German status, she converted to Orthodoxy, and was baptized

Yekaterina Alexeyevna (a liks ‘say eev na).

The following year Peter and Catherine were joined and began 18 years of utter marital failure. He frittered away his life obsessing on toy soldiers and military parades, fawning over Prussian king Frederick II, one of Russia’s great enemies, drinking and playing cards with his friends and generally making his wife’s life miserable by his volatile personality and vicious temper.

In her isolation, Catherine began to educate herself, becoming one of the most erudite and accomplished intellects in Europe and she reached out to secure allies at court. Not a

particularly beautiful woman, she was charming and possessed a powerful sexual energy, which won her powerful lovers, friends (and enemies) and provided her three children the impotent Peter could not give. Contrary to rumor and thus greatly disappointing generations of undergraduates, her sexual exploits were confined to two legged partners. Next time: the inconvenient czar.

At the University of Richmond, this is Dan Roberts.

Resources

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